

CIACO NID 81 [REDACTED]

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USSR: Absence of Party Plenum

The Politburo's decision not to hold a Central Committee plenum before the Supreme Soviet session this week may involve uncertainty or even political divisions within the Politburo over what to do about Poland. [REDACTED]

On all but four occasions since Brezhnev became party leader in 1964, the Central Committee has met within a month before every Supreme Soviet. The departures from the norm appear to have been caused by political controversy within the Politburo. [REDACTED]

In the current situation, the failure of the recent Soviet letter to the Poles to stem the reformist tide presumably left the Politburo with nothing positive to report to a plenum that almost certainly would have focused on the Polish question. Although the Supreme Soviet session had been announced publicly, and thus had to proceed, a plenum may have been postponed in order to allow more time to evaluate Polish developments. [REDACTED]

During the crisis over Czechoslovakia in 1968 the Politburo appeared to have acted in this way. It held a plenum in mid-July--almost three weeks after the Supreme Soviet met--to provide a report on its handling of the situation. USA Institute Director Arbatov told [REDACTED] on Tuesday that a plenum will be held but gave no date. [REDACTED]

The complexities of the Polish problem also may be causing political divisions in the Politburo, although there is no direct evidence of this. Some leaders may be arguing for tough and decisive action, while others may prefer to continue temporizing. The stakes involved would make such a debate highly contentious. [REDACTED]

The Politburo would not want to hold a plenum under such circumstances. It recognizes that such divisions could lead to a political free-for-all in the Central Committee, which would in turn reduce the USSR's political leverage in dealing with the Polish leadership. A delay, on the other hand, might assist in forging a Politburo consensus on Poland, where even leaders as powerful as Brezhnev would want company. [REDACTED]

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